

Oregon Department of Transportation

# NEWS RELEASE

**Region 1** *Columbia, Washington, Multnomah, Clackamas  
and Hood River Counties*

October 2, 2006

06-078 R1

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## Orchard cannon use on I-5 Bridges starts Friday

Starting Friday, Oct. 6 and continuing through Monday, Nov. 6, ODOT Bridge crews plan to use propane orchard cannons to scare starlings off the lift spans of the Interstate Bridges. Each fall, tens of thousands of starlings migrate to the Portland/Vancouver area. Many of the flocks roost on the Interstate Bridges—particularly the lift spans—in the fall and winter. Bird droppings coat the bridges, the catwalks, the roadway, vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians. The mess is unhealthy, unsafe and unsightly. Uric acid in the bird droppings can corrode metal and adversely affect the lift mechanisms and paint of the bridges resulting in increased bridge maintenance. This year the cannons will operate a total of **19 days, for about two-and-a-half hours each day, in the late afternoon and early evening.**

### Orchard cannons

Propane orchard cannons were originally designed to disturb birds in fruit orchards. They create a loud noise—the boom of an air cannon—to startle the birds. This year, four cannons will be used. They will be placed on the outside corners of the draw spans to disturb the birds on all four tower sections—the parts of the bridge where crews spend the most time. Drivers crossing the bridges will hear the blasts, which may occur as often as **once every 15 seconds.**

### What is the schedule for cannon use?

ODOT crews will not use the cannons every day, but instead will vary the days of cannon use based on the reaction of the birds. Employing this random schedule will prevent the birds from becoming accustomed to a regular pattern. Currently, the cannons are scheduled to be used Friday, Oct. 6 through Monday, Oct. 9. The response by the starlings will then help determine planned use of the cannons for the coming weeks.

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## Combination of tools to be used against birds

This year, the orchard cannons will be one of three tools ODOT crews will utilize in this effort. In addition to the cannons, workers will employ machines that replicate the sounds made by predatory birds. They will also use the low-tech method of banging on the steel bridge beams with hammers. This combination of techniques was suggested by a bird expert ODOT has hired to consult on this project. While the preference would be for the birds to move off the bridges completely, significantly reduced numbers on the lift spans is the goal. The lift spans play a crucial role for both Interstate 5 traffic and marine traffic. Ensuring the bridges operate smoothly and that ODOT personnel are able to work in a safe and healthy environment is our paramount concern.

## Interstate Bridges Bird Cannons: FAQ

### ❑ When will the cannons operate?

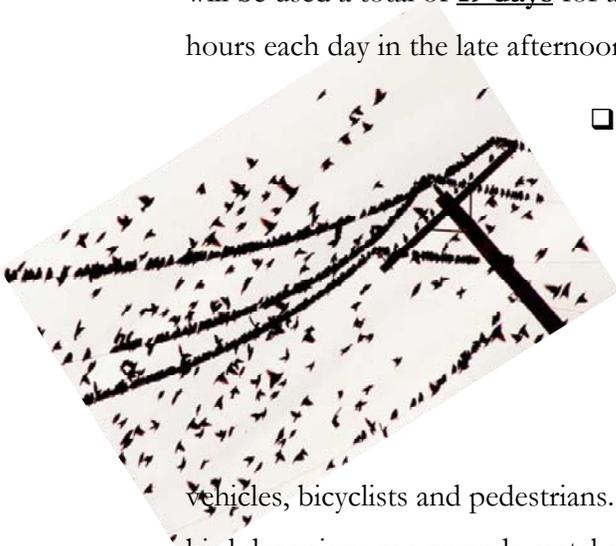
Between Friday, Oct. 6 and Monday, Nov. 6 the cannons will be used a total of **19 days** for about two-and-a-half hours each day in the late afternoon and early evening.

### ❑ Why do this?

Tens of thousands of starlings migrate to the Portland/Vancouver area each fall; they roost on the Interstate Bridges—particularly the lift spans—in the fall and winter. Bird droppings coat the bridges, the catwalks, the roadway, vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians. The mess is unhealthy, unsafe and unsightly. Uric acid in the bird droppings can corrode metal and adversely affect the lift mechanisms and paint of the bridges resulting in increased bridge maintenance.

### ❑ How will it work?

Propane orchard cannons were originally designed to disturb birds in apple orchards. They create a loud noise—the boom of an air cannon—to startle the birds. We will not fire the cannons every day, but instead will vary the days of cannon use based on the reactions of the



birds. Employing this random schedule of cannon use will not allow the birds to become accustomed to a regular pattern.

This year, four cannons will be used, one on the outside corner of each drawspan to disturb the birds on all four tower sections— the parts of the bridge where crews spend the most time.

**Drivers crossing the bridges will hear the blasts, which could occur as often as once every 15 seconds.**

❑ **What else have you tried?**

Over the past 25 years, maintenance crews have tried virtually everything that seemed even remotely reasonable to purge these pests: noisemakers, chemical applications and sharp-edged moldings, to name just a few.

❑ **Why start now?**

With fall here and cooler weather soon to follow, more birds are arriving daily. It is important to start this effort before they nestle in for the winter. Bird experts have said the longer the starlings are allowed to establish a routine the more difficult it will be to disrupt them.



❑ **When will you know if there's an effect?**

Last year, we noticed an effect almost immediately—birds moved away from the lift spans and settled in nearby trees and on other sections of the Interstate Bridges.

❑ **What's the best effect you can hope for?**

We would prefer the birds move off the bridges completely; however significantly reduced numbers on the lift spans is the goal. Obviously the lift spans play a crucial role for both Interstate 5 traffic and marine traffic. Ensuring the bridges operate smoothly and that ODOT personnel are able to work in a safe and healthy environment is our paramount concern.

**Warning signs will be posted to alert drivers**

**##ODOT##**